



ADMINISTRATION ON AGING

The Administration on Aging and the Older Americans Act

Today, one in every six Americans, or 44 million people, are 60 years of age or older. While most older Americans are active members of their families and communities, others are at risk of losing their independence. These include four million Americans aged 85 and older, those living alone without a caregiver, those living in nursing homes or other institutional settings, members of minority groups, older persons with physical or mental impairments, low-income older persons, and those who are abused, neglected or exploited.

The Older Americans Act

To meet the diverse needs of the growing numbers of older persons in the United States, the Older Americans Act of 1965 (OAA), as amended, created the primary vehicle for organizing, coordinating and providing community-based services and opportunities for older Americans and their families. All individuals 60 years of age and older are eligible for services under the OAA, although priority attention is given to those who are in greatest need. The Senior Community Service Employment program, a part of the OAA currently administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, offers part- or full-time employment to low-income persons who are 55 years of age or older. In FY 1997, the OAA appropriation was approximately \$830 million for programs administered by the Administration on Aging (AoA).

The Administration on Aging

The OAA established AoA, which is headed by an Assistant Secretary for Aging and is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

AoA is the federal focal point and advocacy agency for older persons, as mandated by the OAA, and administers most OAA programs at the federal level. These programs provide assistance to older persons and their caregivers, as well as critical support services, such as nutrition and transportation, for older persons at risk of being prematurely or unnecessarily institutionalized. AoA also administers programs that protect the rights of vulnerable and at-risk older persons and educates them and their communities about the dangers of elder abuse and consumer fraud. Other OAA programs offer older persons opportunities to enhance their health and serve their communities through employment and volunteer programs.

The National Aging Network

AoA provides leadership, technical assistance and support to the national aging network. Headed by AoA's central office in Washington, D.C., and its regional offices across the country, the aging network comprises 57 State Units on Aging (SUAs); more than 661 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs); 222 tribal organizations, representing 300 tribes; and thousands of service providers, senior centers, caregivers and volunteers. Working in close partnership, the members of the aging network plan, coordinate and develop community-level systems of services designed to meet the needs of older persons and their caregivers.

State Units on Aging

AoA awards funds for supportive home and community-based services to the SUAs, which are located in every state and U.S. territory. In addition

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to funding critical nutrition and supportive services, funds are awarded to the SUAs for elder rights programs, including the long-term care ombudsman program, legal services, outreach and elder abuse prevention efforts. Funding for programs is allocated to each SUA based on the number of persons over the age of 60 in the state. Most states are divided into planning and service areas, so that programs can be tailored to meet the specific needs of older persons residing in those areas.

Area Agencies on Aging

Nationally, more than 661 AAAs receive funds from their SUAs to plan, develop, coordinate and arrange for services to assist the older persons who are in greatest need in each planning and service area. The AAAs also work closely with senior advisory groups made up of older members in each community. As a whole, the AAAs contract with 27,000 service provider agencies and public and private groups to provide home and community-based care services, which include:

- Access Services—information and assistance; outreach; escort and transportation; and case management
- In-Home Services—home-delivered meals; chores; home repair; modifications and rehabilitation; homemaker/home health aides; and personal care
- Community Services—congregate meals; senior center activities; adult day care; nursing home ombudsman services; elder abuse prevention; legal services; employment and pension counseling; health promotion; and fitness programs
- Caregiver Services—respite; adult day care; counseling and education. AoA also works to assist older persons with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. It also supports caregivers by improving coordination between health care and community service systems.

Native Americans

AoA awards funds to 222 tribal organizations, representing more than 300 tribes in the United States, to assist older American Indians, Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiians. Native Americans in general—and older Native Americans in particular—are among the most disadvantaged groups in the country. AoA's support provides home and community-based services in keeping with the cultural heritage and specific needs of each person receiving assistance.

Discretionary Grants Programs

Since 1965, AoA's Discretionary Grants Programs have kept the OAA vital and responsive to the needs of a rapidly changing and growing older population. Demonstration projects test program initiatives in order to serve the elderly more effectively, especially vulnerable older persons. Such projects lay the foundation for programs to expand nationally under the OAA. Some of these programs include home-delivered meals or congregate meals, the long-term care ombudsman program, legal services, home and community-based care, aging services infrastructure development, the home equity conversion program and elder abuse prevention.

AoA's discretionary grants have been instrumental in leveraging public, local and private support for innovative programs that serve the elderly and disabled. Although recent budget reductions have curtailed many discretionary programs, ongoing demonstration projects include the Eldercare Locator, a national toll-free information and assistance directory for caregivers and their families; Family Friends, a program made up of older volunteers who support chronically ill or disabled children and their families; and Senior Legal Hotline and Legal Assistance programs.

In previous years, AoA has provided funding to educational institutions for the development of



professional and paraprofessional training program curricula. Additionally, AoA awarded funding to support national resource centers for long-term care, housing, older women, nutrition, Native Americans and elder abuse prevention. Disaster assistance for older victims of presidentially declared disasters has also been provided by AoA through the discretionary grants program.

Consumer Protection

AoA's elder rights protection programs include the long-term care ombudsman program, which investigates and resolves complaints that are made by or on behalf of residents of nursing, board and care, and similar adult care homes; elder abuse prevention programs; legal services; and outreach and pension counseling programs. In addition to these critical elder rights programs, AoA is an active partner in the Administration's ongoing efforts to combat fraud and abuse in the Medicare and Medicaid programs. Through AoA, more than 600 ombudsmen across the country have been trained to recognize Medicare and Medicaid waste, fraud and abuse.

Preparing for the Future

AoA is tapping the rich talents of today's older Americans through its volunteer service programs. AoA's intergenerational programs throughout the aging network are helping families by working with Head Start children and their parents, providing counseling to troubled youths and offering respite care to those who care for disabled children. Older volunteers work at the community level to enhance the independence of the elderly as well. AoA also has expanded its focus on caregiving to include issues related to elderly persons who are raising their grandchildren.

Through consumer advocacy and education, AoA raises public awareness about the importance of preparing now for the later years. AoA is providing

leadership in redefining retirement by focusing attention on individuals' current attitudes and lifestyles, which contribute to good health, a satisfying quality of life and financial security in the future.

AoA focuses its efforts in the priority areas of community-based long-term care; consumer protection and empowerment; fraud and abuse detection and education; and outreach to and information for older Americans, their families, policymakers and the general public. By allowing older Americans to remain in their own homes—thus ensuring their dignity and independence—and enhancing their opportunities to contribute to their communities and the nation, AoA continues to ensure that its mandate is being fully realized for present and future generations.

For more information about AoA, the OAA and the aging network, please contact:

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The Eldercare Locator can provide the name and phone number of the AAA(s) nearest to the person needing assistance, and can be reached from anywhere in the country by dialing toll-free, 1-800-677-1116, Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., Eastern Standard Time.